

came out of the budget. It didn't come out of the Homeland Security budget, much like roads come out of the Transportation budget. They had to absorb that, they have had to move rangers in and absorb the Homeland Security costs.

Of course every agency is struggling with labor costs, health care costs, pension costs. And the net result of all this pressure on the national parks is, even though we have been steadily increasing funding here, with the additional costs in homeland security, the additional costs on employees and the additional land that we have added to the national parks system, the additional sites we have added, the additional conservation areas under a whole range of heritage areas, national roads and different things that go into their responsibility.

The net impact is that many of our national parks, we have seen as much as a 67 percent reduction in actual rangers at the parks. While we have put money on the backlog, a backlog doesn't mean that you have eliminated the problem. For example, if you fix the restroom at a park and you fix a visitors center or you fix a sewer system, because of amortization and declining facility and road use, you are constantly, by fixing the backlog, if you divert your money from your current operating to fix the backlog, it merely means now you are in effect getting a front-log. In other words, you are adding new expenses that then get added to the backlog. So even as we have increased funds here, we have fallen further behind.

And the question is what was our national parks system going to look like for our kids and for our grandkids. It is something that can easily get lost in whatever the crush of the day is. If it is immunization, if it is Medicaid, if it is prescription drugs for seniors, if it is border security, it gets lost in the system.

For the 50th anniversary that Congress passed sufficiently ahead of time, which is what we are trying to do here, what was called Mission 66, there was a commitment over a number of years to fund adequate funding for the national parks so for the 50th birthday, in 1966, we could see the roads, the visitation facilities and other things set for the 50th anniversary. That is why we require forward funding at this time.

This proposal by the administration is not exactly like the Centennial Act, but very similar. It commits dollars from the government, both directly for funding, roughly it looks like around 100 to \$200 million a year in direct funding, plus it creates a challenge grant. Now, the fundamental part of our bill was a challenge grant that people could take a deduction, and then whatever the shortfall was from the 270 million we needed annually, the Federal Government would make up the difference.

The total here is the same in the President's bill, but it has a direct one-

for-one match. Right now, if people give 20 million to the national parks, it will give up to a hundred million with a hundred million dollar match, plus additional to get to that 270 figure. We hopefully can do that up to now to 2016. And I hope this doesn't just put more rangers in the parks, as the President said, and meet the needs that we have in homeland security and infrastructure, but that we realize that our national park System isn't only wilderness, isn't only visitation, it isn't only going to the parks to see what are the classic mountain peaks or the great and wonderful deserts or the volcanoes, or whatever the particular natural park you think of, it is our number one place for historic preservation of buildings, of artifacts. It is the number one, arguably, place that we even have art in America because of all the parks and certain sites devoted to art. But it is more than just that. It is our number one laboratory in America where you still have wildlife, where you have trees and plants and frogs and things that you can scientifically study.

And I would also challenge, as we develop this, to look at creative ways that the National Park Service can use the Internet, can use the education to bring this to schools all over America, to families all over America, and not just if you visit the park, a ranger talk that now can draw a few people at the campfire. If we look ahead to the year 2016, that ought to be available on the Internet where in your home, by your own campfire, you can join in with the people that are actually at the campfire.

I hope that this passes Congress and that we are creatively looking at where the National Park Service will head in the year 2016.

[From USA Today]

#### PRESIDENT PUSHES BOOST IN FUNDING FOR NATIONAL PARKS

(By Richard Wolf)

WASHINGTON.—National parks would be a big winner under President Bush's 2008 budget, and a plan to match up to \$100 million annually in private donations could guarantee increases for a decade.

Bush's budget, being unveiled today, would give the National Park Service \$2.4 billion next year, administration officials told USA TODAY. That includes a \$258 million increase for daily operations, up 14.5%. Since 2002, those funds have risen 1.5% above inflation.

The president proposes adding at least \$100 million a year for the next 10 years. The funds would be used to hire 3,000 seasonal park rangers, guides and maintenance workers each summer, an increase of more than 50%. In addition, more than 1 million children could be enrolled in youth programs.

On top of that, Bush wants Congress to guarantee that the federal government would match philanthropic donations each year, up to another \$100 million. Currently, about \$20 million is contributed each year by supporters of national parks, such as family foundations.

Taken together, the proposals could provide \$3 billion in new parks funding over the coming decade. In 2016, the parks will celebrate their 100th anniversary; Bush wants them to be in better shape than they are today.

"I think it can be a source of healing for Americans," Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said. "This one is not partisan. This one is American."

The proposal is being welcomed by groups that advocate on behalf of the nearly 400 sites managed by the National Park Service and have been a thorn in the Bush administration's side during lean years. The National Parks Conservation Association was seeking an increase of \$250 million in operating funds for the parks.

"This is a renewed commitment that national parks should be a national priority," said Tom Kiernan, the group's president. "It's a catalyzing initiative at a wonderful time for the national parks."

The proposals would have to be approved separately by Congress. The \$2.4 billion parks budget, with its record increase in operating funds, would become final if Congress allocates the funding. The matching-funds proposal would have to be approved by committees with jurisdiction over the Interior Department.

Taken together, they would add thousands of new park workers to guide visitors with programs such as interpretive walks and campfire talks. Volunteer coordinators would be added in 44 sites.

Seasonal workers have been cut during lean budget years, resulting in a 10-year decline.

"We simply have lost contact people who meet the American public," said Stephen Whitesell, superintendent of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas. "What they're not seeing are rangers in flat hats."

Since 9/11, most of the money added to the National Park Service budget has gone for added security in such places as New York City, Washington, D.C., and along the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico.

Some of the new funds will be used to attract young people to the parks through Internet programs and podcasts. Kempthorne and others see it as mutually beneficial: The parks would avoid a loss of visitors in future generations, and children would reap the health benefits of the great outdoors.

"We're competing with an electronic world," Kempthorne said.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### A LONG WAY TRAVELED AND A LONG WAY YET TO GO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, February is Black History Month, a time that we have set aside to honor the contributions that African Americans have made to this Nation. Some question the continuing need for a month-long celebration; others see it as a poor substitute for concerted national action to address the needs of African Americans. But Black History Month remains a time for reflection on the progress of our national journey towards a truly equal and just society.

America has traveled a long way in the last few decades, but we have a